

The Subterraneans

I

Once I was young and had so much more orientation and could talk with nervous intelligence about everything and with clarity and without as much literary preambing as this; in other words this is the story of an unselfconfident man, at the same time of an egomaniac, naturally, facetious won't do – just to start at the beginning and let the truth seep out, that's what I'll do –. It began on a warm summer-night – ah, she was sitting on a fender with Julien Alexander who is . . . let me begin with the history of the subterraneans of San Francisco . . .

Julien Alexander is the angel of the subterraneans, the subterraneans is a name invented by Adam Moorad who is a poet and friend of mine who said 'They are hip without being slick, they are intelligent without being corny, they are intellectual as hell and know all about Pound without being pretentious or talking too much about it, they are very quiet, they are very Christlike.' Julien certainly is Christlike. I was coming down the street with Larry O'Hara old drinking buddy of mine from all the times in San Francisco in my long and nervous and mad careers I've gotten drunk and in fact cadged drinks off friends with such 'genial' regularity nobody really cared to notice or announce that I am developing or was developing, in my youth, such bad free-loading habits though of course they did notice but liked me and as Sam said 'Everybody comes to you for your gasoline boy, that's some filling station you got there' or say words to that effect – old Larry O'Hara always nice to me, a crazy Irish young businessman of San Francisco with Balzacian backroom in his bookstore where they'd smoke tea and talk of the old days of the great Basie band or the days of the great

Chu Berry – of whom more anon since she got involved with him too as she had to get involved with everyone because of knowing me who am nervous and many levelled and not in the least one-souled – not a piece of my pain has showed yet – or suffering – Angels, bear with me – I’m not even looking at the page but straight ahead into the sadglint of my wallroom and at a Sarah Vaughan Gerry Mulligan Radio KROW show on the desk in the form of a radio, in other words, they were sitting on the fender of a car in front of the Black Mask bar on Montgomery Street, Julien Alexander the Christ-like unshaved thin youthful quiet strange almost as you or as Adam might say apocalyptic angel or saint of the subterraneans, certainly star (now), and she, Mardou Fox, whose face when first I saw it in Dante’s bar around the corner made me think, ‘By God, I’ve got to get involved with that little woman’ and maybe too because she was Negro. Also she had the same face that Rita Savage a girlhood girlfriend of my sister’s had, and of whom among other things I used to have daydreams of her between my legs while kneeling on the floor of the toilet, I on the seat, with her special cool lips and Indian-like hard high soft cheekbones – same face, but dark, sweet, with little eyes honest glittering and intense she Mardou was leaning saying something extremely earnestly to Ross Wallenstein (Julien’s friend) leaning over the table, deep – ‘I got to get involved with her’ – I tried to shoot her the glad eye the sex eye she never had a notion of looking up or seeing – I must explain, I’d just come off a ship in New York, paid off before the trip to Kobe Japan because of trouble with the steward and my inability to be gracious and in fact human and like an ordinary guy while performing my chores as saloon messman (and you must admit now I’m sticking to the facts), a thing typical of me, I would treat the first engineer and the other officers with backwards-falling politeness, it finally drove them angry, they wanted me to say something, maybe gruff, in the morning, while setting their coffee down and instead of which silently on crepefeet I rushed to do their bidding and never cracked a smile or if so a sick one, a superior one, all having to do with that loneliness angel riding on my shoulder as I came down warm Montgomery Street that night and saw Mardou on the fender with